Umar Al-Mukhtar and the Jihad against Italian colonialism
The contemporary German perception

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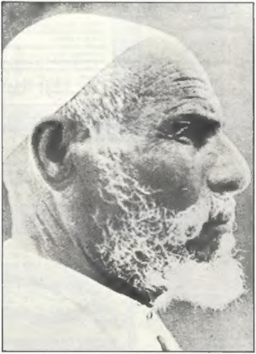

Umar Al-Mukhtar — شيخ المجاهدين عمر المختار

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• Some preliminaries and comments on sources:

The two noble tributes of honour to Umar al Mukhtar, discovered in the German press at his time, testify to the wide respect, which the hero's dignified appearance and gallant deeds commanded beyond the jabal Al-Akhdar, beyond the Muslim lands in the Dar-al-Harb. However,the two memorials do not indicate a solidarity nor a homogeniety of the contemporary German perception of Umar al-Mukhtar's Jihad against Italian colonialism and christian European encroachment in his homeland and in the Dar-al-Islam. As it emerges from the German consular and embassy records and reports as well as from academic treatises, news agencies and journalism of the time, the spectrum of the official and public opinion and perception was wide and showed up many discordant elements, which point to very different political, cultural and ideological premises and interests. As the limited and scarce sources that were available to me do not allow comprehensive classificaiton and scientific quantification, I shall rather give an account of what was being reported to the German public and officialdom and by doing so bring to the fore the historical dimension of Umar al-Mukhtars Jihad as seen from the angle of the contemporary German perception, no matter how deficient that may turn out.

The official records :

The unpublished sources used in the paper are contained in the files of the German foreign Office Archives in Bonn. Those, which have turned to be useful, are grouped under politische Abteilung II (Pol II) Politik - Tripolis. They make up the following files:

Pol II	Politische Verhaltnisse in Tripolis (Political situation in Tripolis)	2 vols. 1920 - 1931
	Innere Verwaltung (administration)	1 vol. 1927 - 1929
	Wirtschaft (economics)	7 vols. 1928 - 1936
	Deutsche Botschaft Rom. Ital. Kolonien parcel Nr. 713 1920 - 1939	

Newspaper collections

Use was made of collections of press-clippings held in the prestigious Hamburger WeltWirtschaftsarchiv (HWWA) and in Hamburger Institute for International Relations, which was started after the I. World War on the lines of the Royal Institute of International Relations, which was started after the I. World War on the Lines of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London. In each case, the press-clippings are arranged country by country; while those kept in the HWWA have been re-arranged under modern country or state names like Libya and brought on microfilm, those in the Institute for International Relations are still under the contemporary filing system, which means that press reports on Umar al Mukhtar are contained in the boxes on Italian colonies. In both cases the collections are considerable; because different varieties of papers were kept and because different people did the clipping service, it is worthwhile to use both press-clipping archives, as has been done in this case.

Umar Al-Mukhtars Jihad and the Italian invasion of Libya as recorded and perceived in Germany :

1. The period up to 1922

The German reports on Umar Al-Mukhtars resistance towards the Italian invasion of Libya usually emphasize the continuity of the struggle by alternatively focusing either on the role of such leaders as Umar Al-Mukhtar[1] or on the organisation of the sanusiya[2] or else on the historical record of Italy's bid for African colonies[3]. Notwithstandingly, certain stages or phases of the struggle are distinguishable. Out of the three periods from 1911 to 1922, 1922 to 1928 and 1929 to 1931, the first one seems to have

found no report which mentions Umar Al-Mukhtar. It is later-on that details are given about his pre-world war I career, which must have been formative for his general outlook on life and on the challenges, to which Islam must find a response. It was not before 1928 that a German reader could learn about Umar al-Mukhtars civil occupation, before he took up arms. In its May issue of 1928 the Berlin based Islam Echo drew the following portrait of him: «Sayid Umar Al-Mukhtar, the famous freedom fighter in the Jabal Al-Akhdar, had earlier been the sheykh of the zawiya of al-Kussur in the neighbourhood of al-Marj (north West of Banghazi), which at that time was the residence of the Turkish administration. At the beginning of the Italian assault on Libya Umar Al Mukhtar had been the first to assist the Turks, who were already evacuating Banghazi. Having just returned from a visit to the Grand-Senussis in Kufra, he immediately organised an army of approximately 1000 men from the tribe of the Ubaid ('Abid) and helped the Turks, whose army stood at «Bunaida. It was by his example that all the sheykhs of the sanusiya had mobilised their men and joined the Turks. During the war Umar Al-Mukhtar had always fought in the first battle-line and when peace was arranged, it was largely due to his instigations that the indigenous population decided to continue the fighting. Ever since then he had fought in the Jabal Al-Akhdar, where he got his weapons almost exclusively from the exploits of raiding and fighting the Italians»[4].

The Islam Echo was neither a newspaper nor a journal nor does it seem to have had a wider circulation beyond the small muslim community in Germany, some orientalists and perhaps some specialists and cosmopolitans among German academics and officials. Traces of it were not found in the records of the German foreign office, nor was it quoted by the current newpapers, which have been consulted. A clue of what the cultured and privileged class of the Wilhelminian society may have thought of the Italian-Ottoman war in Libya in 1911/1912 might be gained from a short account in the bimonthly «Die Erde. Ein Journal für länder-und völkerkunde, Reisen und Jagd (The Earth. A Journal for geography and ethnography, travelling and hunting). In its issue of December 1912 the situation in Libya was compared with that in the balkans and put in the wider context of West versus East. «In both instances», as the account read, «in theBalkans as in the Sirtica, Islam, the old Orient, tried to resist the modern West. It is the mirror of our own Middle Ages, which struggles against the modern age:

A comparison is a lesson in itself.

In south-Eastern Europe it is the Orient, which, slavishly imitating the West and already being infected by its slogans, displays its incompetence by fighting against Europe. In Tripolitania-Cyrenaika it is the old and true Orient, that runs with bent fusils and long pistols against the machine-guns and bayonets, devoid of all strategy, driven only by blind fanaticism»[5].

From the hindsight of Italy's fascist colonial policy as well as of later press coverage in Germany it can already here be stated that this stereotype of materialist Western arrogance and imperialist ideology survived the world war. As regards the German-Turkish comradeship-in-arms in 1915/1916, with which the sanusiya in Libya and presumaby Umar Al-Mukhtar joined forces, it did not engender solidarity with a people, to whom the end of the war was the beginning of new threats of subjection. When the episode was referred to at all, it was usually to give limelight to the German submarines[6].

In the early twenties, and this holds good for the later periods, German official as well as press reports on Umar Al-Mukhtar's Jihad were always coloured by Italian information. The reasons are abvious. The German consulate at Tripolis had been closed during the world war; thereafter German trade with Tripolis or Banghazi was so negligent that as late as spring 1927, the German General Consulate in Naples and the Embassy in Rome thought the reestablishment of a consulate in Tripolis unnecessary[7]

Furthermore, journalists could not enter Libya without Italian permission and escorte which was difficult to obtain. Thus reports on internal events in Libya and on the fighting in the Jabal Akhdar to the German Foreign Office were written in Rome, which also harboured the North African correspondents of the German newspapers. However, there was growing eagerness to cheque Egyptian papers, which reached Europe via London. As will be shown later, this happened when fascist Italy decreed sharp censorship.

The keynote of the German reports before Mussolini's rise to power in October 1922 was one of cautious suspense amounting to uncertainty about Italy's ultimate aims in Libya. A report from the German Embassy in Rome, dated 22nd November 1920, is a case for illustration[8]: Recorded was the

scheme of the Tripolitanian sheyhs and notables of forming a state under the leadership of Sayid Ahmad Idris, who at that time was mending Mustafa Kemal's fences against the Greeks and British in Anatolia on Islmaic lines. Mercatelli's strong warning, against any such act was questioned on whether the government in Rome would actually back him up, once deeds had to follow words. On the other hand, attention was drawn to the traditional Italian policy of playing the various tribes and shyehs off against each other and which therefore would not allow the formation of a central authority in Tripolitania, which by unifying the various groups would deprive Italy of political leverage. Hardly four months later, however, the government in Rome deemed it opportune enough to receive a delegation from the self-installed permanent congress of the Jabal Ghariyan. As the embassy by then reported to Berlin, the measure of Italian compromise might be decided by the extent of Rome's suverainty, which was necessary to prevent any drift of Tripolitania into the orbit of a rival colonial power, most probably France. Again in a follow-up report, dated May 5th 1921, Italian policy was searched more thoroughly[9]. By this time, events, however, provided the answers. In the Cyrenaika the parliament, which Italy had granted after the world-war, had opened its inaugural session. Against this background, the reception of the Ghariyan delegation was interpreted as a gesture of making good weather, in order not to disturb the happening in Cyrenaika and its likely propaganda effect throughout the Middle East and North Africa. L.S. Diel, who had drafted the report, obviously was not sure, whether all was part of a general effort of rallying Arab nationalists everywhere around Italy or whether it simply was making a virtue of sheer necessity of complying with the League of Nations' mandate concept for the former Ottoman provinces. Surely, whatever the motivations of Italian policy were, the session of the 69 deputies in the parliament of the Cyrenaika, most of which were closely linked up with the sanusiya and the various tribes in the region, was not only a tremendous boost for Islamic revivalism and the establishment of islamic authority, but also a constitutional act, which a law-abiding government in Rome could not easily undo. Diel's report to Berlin indicates, that the Ghariyn delegation seemed to have fallen under the spell of the moment. For although the secretary of state for the colonies, Signor Rossi, told them, that he had only listened to their private opinions, they nevertheless handed to the Italian press a very conciliatory communique

on their departure so as not to distract the government in Rome from its pro-Islamic course. The report, however, also betrays considerable uneasiness about the fact, that the government,s Islamic policy had become an axplosive isse in domestic and party politics, which might sooner or later trigger off large-scale problems if not international complications.

These forebodings of the rise of Italian Fascism and of a fascist colonial policy should not only be seen in the narrow context of Italian domestic politics, but also against the background of the policies pursued by Britain and France in the Middle East, which made mockery of the stipulations of the mandate concept. The other way around, London and Paris contributed to the rise of fascist colonial policy in Libya. This undeniable fact also effected the standards by which German reports judged Italian policy and war measures against Libya later on. Again and again the reports kept drawing attention to the overall policy issues in he Middle East and North Africa[10], the observation of which seems by the time have also helped to foster those German elements, that resented the loss of African colonies[11] and later-on looked on Mussolini's North African policy as a lesson of how to regain them.

How did the sheyhs of the sanusiya and the men around Umar Al-Mukhtar look at the storm as it was brewing? To fully understand their anxieties, a reservation has to be made of what has been said before. Despite a certain pro-Islamic tendency in the pre-fascist Italian government policy towards Libya and despite the mounting fascist agitation against that policy, which was accused of weakness, the fact must not be overlooked, that pre-fascist Italy was also intent on establishing a kind of «Fourth Shore» in Libya. The attempts at settler colonialism, at agricultural settlements, however experimental and slow in the beginning, did put the people of Libya and the sheyhs of the sanusiya on the alert. The German official records, although written far from the spot, nevertheless provide some detail about the formation from the titular head of the Cyrenaika to the tribes and the people at large at the turn of the year 1921/22. According to an agreement between Italy and the Emir Sayid Idris, the 25th of october 1921 had been fixed as a deadline for the delivery of all weapons by the local population and for the final dissolution of the garrisons of the sanusiya troops. The sheyhs of the sanusiya as well as of the principal tribes and also Umar Al-Mukhtar

deemed it unprudent to comply with the fixed date and the Italian demands. No doubt, they were keen observors of the weather, that was brewing. A report by the German Embassy, dated 8th of October, recorded[12], that the tribal leaders were assembled and had been negotiating for several weeks in Al-Abyar,70Km south of Banghazi, with delegates from the Emir Sayid Idris. The report alludes, that they had been told about the Italian demands at short notice and practically been overruled by the Emir. Obviously, they were resolved to resist; for their counter was: the maintenance of the garrisons, new elections for the parliament and options for parliamentary session outside the range of the artillery of the Italian navy at Banghazi. As the report reckoned, the Italian Government would have to give in to a certain extent, because the only alternative would be a military operation of some scale. Unfortunately, there is a gap in the Embassy reports of almost 14 months. Towards the end of 1922, a report came in from the Embassy in Cairo which quoted the Egyptian newspapers al-Liwa, As-Siyasa and Al-Ahram as saying that armed resistance had occured in Tripolitania and that an agreement had been concluded between the Arabs of the Cyrenaika and of Tripolitania of forming a bloc between Egypt and Tunisia. Mention was also made of current Italian/British/Egyptian negotiations on the delimitation of Egypt's western boundary[13]

A summary of the state of affairs at the end of the first period of the Libyan-Italian confrontation and on the eve of the rise of a fascist colonial policy shows up four major developments, that were to shape forthcoming events:

1) **The new alert and resort to resistance among the tribes and the sheyhs of the zawiyas in the Cyrenaika.**
2) **The assumption of sovereign action by the sheyhs and tribal leaders independent of the Emirs bargains with the Italians.**
3) **The approaches between Tripolitania and the Cyrenaika and their mutual desire for close cooperation.**
4) **The rise of fascism in Italy.**

The continuity of the Libyan struggle against Italian colonialism and in particular the continuity of Umar Al-Mukhtar's dedication to the freedom and sovereignty of his country and of Islamic lands in general is best testified by the fact, that the resort to a major effort of organising resistance took place in a period of Italian policy, which though descibed as liberal or

enlightened (or weak) by European observors, nevertheless intolerably interfered with another people's right to liberty and existence in accordance with its own laws. Umar Al-Mukhtar's Jihad was not in response to Italian fascist colonial policy. The latter only made the issue more acute. On the whole, the German official records give a fairly accurate, though by no means complete picture of what was going on. The recording of the meeting of tribal heads at Al-Abyar in autumm 1921 is of particular significance, because it points to the real power structure in the country. The event has not found prominence in E.E. Evans-Pritchards authoritative book on the Sanusi of Cyrenaika[14]. On the other hand, the gap in the German records for most of the year 1922 leaves open many questions about the approaches between Tripolitania and the Cyrenaika, for which other sources have to be consulted and, of course, Evans-Pritchard's book be read.

2. The period from 1922 to 1928 :

It was in the course of the year 1922 that the German public was more comprehensively informed about the resistance movement in Libya. At the end of April, the Weser-Zeitung, a daily newspaper with a national-liberal outlook published in Bremen, reported about Count Volpi's preparations for major military expedition into the hinterland of Tripolis'[15]. The recent approaches between the Arabs of the Cyrenaika and of Tripolitania were mentioned cursorily. At greater length the article dealt with the Italian Socialists' opposition against the new policy of the governor of Tripolis. Count Volpi was accused of having come under the influence of evil advisers, who pushed forward their private interests; furthermore, the aims of the expedition might defeat the desired results, because the traditionally sectarian and discordant tribes and political factions among the sheyhs and notables were likely to join together. The report referred to politicians, who said the developments in Libya were caused by Britain's cession of independence to Egypt.

The German public was misled by the final statement, that during the last ten years Italy had won many friends in the colony and that therefore things were not that worse after all. In November of the same year, the widely read Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung which appeared in Berlin, carried a headline: Upheaval in Tripolis[16]; the article quoted from the French Paper Le Matin and the Italian Messagero which had reported, that an insurgence

was underway in the Cyrenaika, where the Italian mission near Al-Zuwaitina, a coastal town south-west of Banghazi, had been attacked and put on fire and that the government had deployed ships and troops there. Yet a complete picture of the real situation was by now precluded by the sharp censorship of the new fascist regime in Rome, as the German Embassy complained in its reports to Berlin. Egyptian news, which reached Europe via London, began to be traded in Rome. Besides speculation that the new activism of the sanusiya sheyhs might also have been inspired by Mustafa kemal's victories and his steadfastness at Chanak, the Al-Ahram was quoted for saying that it was the sheyhs of the sanusiya, who had worked on Emir Sayid Idris to declare himself ruler over the entire and united Tripolitania[18].

An Embassy report, dated 6th January 1923, took up the latest statements by the new fascist colonial minister Federzoni, which discarded the old regime's policy of compromise and instead advocated the forceful removal of all resistance and opposition. The appointment of General Bongiovanni as new governor of Cyrenaika, where he already served in 1911/12, was seen as evidence for the fascists' resolution.

The Embassy reports for the year 1923,however,dealt primarily with events in Tripolitania, where pressure on the Italians had mounted fast. Mention was frequently made of the capture of modern French weapons as well as of French legionaries, whose presence and coming was a mystery[19]. The first clashes with Arab fighters, which led to the Italian occupation of Misurata, were reported as having inflicted unexpected losses on the Italians in men and ammunition. The reports for the year 1924 focus again on events in the Cyrenaika, where after the departure of General Mombelli, military operations had been started by the Italians against the «Abid tribes and the Bani Bara' asa. As the reports concluded, the Italians were confronted with a gigantic task of subjecting the Cyrenaika [20].

Obviously, the Italian strategy aimed at establishing a militarily secured link and belt between Tripolis and the Cyrenaika, whence they would advance southward to the line of Sokna, Zalla and Aujila as well as Jalo. A major expedition against the Magharaba tribe, that numbered 15.000 people and 2.000 rifles, turned out to be a failure[21], because the tribes were too mobile for the rather static formation of Italian columns and pincer movements. Also, the coastal belt between Tripolitania and theCyrenaika was again and again penetrated by groups of Arab freedom fighters. According to German

reports, the Italians were especially vulnerable in night attacks, as happened in the region of Al-Ghubra in the nights of the 29th and 31st of October, when the Italians lost two officers and 39 regulars[22].

Similar clashes were reported from the region around the oasis Mizda in the Ghibla about 200 km south of Tripolis[23]. This time, although the Italian losses were not unconsiderable, the Arab casualties were appaling. The rate of killing was a result of machine-gunning and areal bombings, to which the rascists were taking resort to and against which the Arabs could hardly protect themselves in the open deserts of the Tripolitanian hinterland.

To sum up the official German records for this second period of Libyan struggle against Italy, there was a marked reserve towards Italian reports on successes of their campaigns in North Africa. The German reports, which suspected the regime of being compelled to report success, rather scrutinized the domestic scenery in Italy and its various opposition groups on the left. Besides this, there was great interest in following up Italian relations with the neighbouring colonial powers, particularly France. Thus a press polemic was extensively reported[24] in which the French newspaper Le Temps had taken exception to the latest 1927 issue of the Annuario, edited by the Institute Coloniale Italiano, the maps of which no longer - as previously - showed the southern borderline between Libya and the French-controlled Tschad. The semi-official Italian papers Tribuna and Impero refuted the polemic with reference to contestable diplomatic practice in the prefascist era.

More details about actual events in Libya were spread by the German press. The German reader for the first time learnt more about the manner and tenacity of Bedouin tactics and fighting against the Italians. It was also now, that Umar al-Mukhtar himself got press coverage. In April 1926, in the Hamburger Fremdenblatt[25] Dr. Rathjens of the Hamburgisches Welt-Wirtschafts Archiv reported at length about the surprises, which he had experienced during a recent visit in Tripolis and a travel of about 270 km through the Interior. The Italian zone, he recorded, was only 200 to 300 km deep, of which, however, less than 100 km were under relatively safe control. The Arabs had proved superior in the desert fighting. Their tactics of surprisal attacks, after which they disappeared on their quick horses as fast as they had come, kept the Italians in constant hazard. The Italians had resorted to brutality by unscrupulously hanging all people, whom they thought guilty or suspect. The keynote of the report, however, was not moral

indignation or denouncement of Italian conlonial policy or fascism. With a keen eye on the agrarian potential of the fertile belts and oases of the country, he indirectly agreed with the aims of extensive colonisation. Italy's colonial aims,he stressed, would require the whole scale occupation of Libya. He considered Mussolini's forthcoming visit to Tripolis as a prelude to such an undertaking.

How did the German press, which was close to socialism, cover these events? In its issue of 13th April 1926, the Hamburger Echo[26] which was affiliated with the Social Democrats, carried a headline: Mussolini in Africa. The Napoleonic Era of Fascism Leipzig or Waterloo Fascist or European Catastrophe? The rather lengthy article commented on a recent speech by the Duce and it vehemently warned against any German-Italian combination in Africa It was a warning against those forces in Germany, which hoped for new chances of regaining the lost colonies on that continent and which might spurn the fascist groups in Germany, to agitate on these lines Mussolini, the article ended, should go to ruin alone, a way that was destined to all imperators. «Glanz und Elend der Diktatur muß Italien allein ertragen»[27] As has already been mentioned, the years 1927 and 1928 saw major efforts of fascist Italy of redressing the balance to their advantage. The conquest and occupation of the prominent zawiya in the oasis of Jaghbub, however, did not turn out to be the triumph, as which it had been hailed by Italian propaganda The Arabs had left it in right time, their resistance was unbroken. The Italians awakened from their illusion in a manner of brutality. In the course of the year 1926 the German public learnt, that upon the appointment of General Teruzzi as new governor of the Cyrenaika, areal bombings had become the Italian response to beduin tactics In a military engagement on the 21st of July the Italians were reported of having dropped more than 40 quintal bombs, which had left visible traces[28] But again there was no denouncement of the Italian war or fashion of fighting it. On the contrary, some reporters were cynical enough to point out that in order to comply with international conventions, the Italian planes did not carry gas bombs.[29]

A marked exception among German language publications was again the Islam Echo in Berlin, which has been referred to before. On the 5th of October 1927 it published an article by Sayid Er-Riba, whose whereabouts were given as Slonta, which is situated east of Bangazi, halfway between Al-Marj and Darna. The headline read: Fascist Colonial policy in the

Cyrenaika[30] Sayid Er-Riba gave a detailed account of how Umar Al-Mukhtar was managing to keep the initiative against the Italian enemy and how distorted Italian account of events were He did confirm that in a recent clash with men of Umar Al-Mukhtar, the Italians had been successful, but that this was rather a happy exception for them. Umar Al-Mukhtar, as Sayid Er-Riba continued, was ever present in the wide regions between Banghazi and Cyrene, where his strongholds were the Jabal Akhdar and the Wadi as-Suf, near to the Mediterranean coast. The Italian reports about the recent fights with Umar al-Mukhtar were put by Er-Riba into their proper context, namely as evidence of how limited Italian control over the Cyrenaika was. According to Er-Riba the Italians reckoned that Umar Al-Mukhtar, had about 1200 men in armour and that he had lost about 900 men recently. Yet they had not succeeded in their recent joint air and ground operations to capture him. Umar Al-Mukhtar, instead, had gone to the bani 'Abid, Bra'asa and Hasa with the Al 'Abaidat, who constituted the largest principal tribe in the Cyrenaika and who had always been Umar al-Mukhtar's supply reserve His closer cooperation now with the Al 'Abaidat would soon turn the scales again in his favour and result in throwing the Italians out of the Cyrenaika. Sayid Er-Riba drew special attention to the fact, that the main line of resistance towards the Italians was further to the south on the line of the oases of Jalo, Gerdobia and Jaghbub. Even a victory against Umar al-Mukhtar in the Jabal al-Akhdar would therefore not mean defeat, because Umar al-Mukhtar was fighting in the back of the Italians and the main front-line would not be touched Er-Riba also reported about the brutality of the fascist war, which was not only evident in the killing-rates and massive executions but also in the politicians' public statements, in which the word «pulverisation of the adversary» had become the superlative for annihilation[31].

The great expectations, which Er-Riba had set in the mobilisation of the Al 'Abaidat by Umar Al-Mukhtar, were frustrated by the blood and iron strategy and tactics of the fascist war. The occupation of Al-Majabra brought the Italian front down to the 29th latitude. It seems that the Italian advance led the Sanusi leader Sayid Mohamad Er-riba to accept an Italian offer of negotiating a peace. Most of the German newspapers stuck to the official Italian propaganda version, according to which Er-Riba had submitted and brought to Italy for exile. The Islam Echo addressed the German public with

a different story[32] which indirectly was confirmed by the contradictory Italian reports on successive military events. The Islam Echo quoted extensively from the Egyptian newspapers As-Sura and Wadi-Nile. Accordingly, Italian planes had dropped leaflets on the oasis of Jalo and Aujila, demanding of the population the end of fighting and the restoration of order and security, for which they were promised full liberty They called on Er-Riba to come for negotiations to the military headquarters at Gerdobia. Upon his arrival, however, he was immediately arrested and deported. When afterwards the Italians spread out the false news, that Er-Riba had submitted voluntarily, the people took up their fight again and elected a new leader. Most probably the Italians had demanded capitulation in an ultimatum, coached in ambiguous terms. As the Islam -Echo pointed out, Italy had a historical record of cheats of this kind. The report of the Islam Echo of 5th March 1923 concluded with recording another gallant deed of Umar al-Mukhtar and his men. Guided by Abdullah Ebbi Sallum and Shebli Sudani, a troop of Beduin fighters had recently reached the Mediterranean coast near Bureika. Also the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung in Berlin in its issue of 24th March 1928 published news of new daring campaigns undertaken by small groups of Beduins, which the Italians had been able to drive back only after fierce fighting It was in the midst of these reports of Umar Al-Mukhtar's campaigns that the Islam Echo published the tribute of honour and laudation on Umar al-Mukhtar, which was cited at the beginning and which was entitled: «A tribute of honour for a North African freedom leader. 15 years of war in the Cyrenaika - Umar al-Mukhtar, the 78 year old army leader - from a religious leader to a freedom hero»[33].

Strangely but true, this time the Islam-Echo referred to a similar laudation in the Giornale d'Italia.

3. The period from 1929 to 1931 .

Seen from the angle of the German press coverage, the official reports sent to the German foreign Office and, of course, from the course of events to come, the turn of the year 1928/1929 ushered in the eclipse of Umar Al-Mukhtar's fortunes, no matter, how unbent his dedication to the freedom of his people, how brave his campaigns and gallant his fighting, how astute his political finesse.

Incoming reports from the German Embassy in Rome, in early 1929,

naturally focused on Tripolitania and Fezzan, where the dashing fascist General Graziani gave first examples, of what was to come. Mohammad Ben Haj Hassan, together with leaders and men of the powerful tribal confederation headad by the famous family of Saif an-Nasir, had returned to the Ghibla and Sirtica, which the Italians had deemed to be under their full control[34], and started operations against Italian installations. Obviously the Italian line along Zalla, Jalo, Gerdobia and Jaghbub, which had been occupied two years before showed holes and its control must have been precarious[35]. Put on alarm, Graziani mobilised considerable forces and designed a strategy, by which the rule of the house of Saif an-Nasir should be crushed. His first tactical successes which followed the new pattern, by which mobile but mechanized columns concentrically moved onto the adversary, whose movements were constantly reported by planes presumably induced Umar Al-Mukhtar in the adjacent Jabal Al-Akhdar to forestall similar moves against his men by offering negotiations for a truce or peace. The German reports, however, are open to speculation. As the Embassy in Rome, on 25th of June 1929, reported to Berlin, it was probably due to the new systematic clearing operations of the Italians and the appointment of Marshall Badoglio as governor for both Tripolitania and Cyrenaika, that Umar al-Mukhtar together with Sayid Hussein ben Mohammad Er-Riba as-Sanusi and Fadil Bu Omar had offered unconditional surrender[36]. The report proceeded, however, by cautioning Berlin on several points, about which more shall be said later. Here it suffices to say, that the report drew attention to what we have already learnt from the Islam Echo, namely that Umar al-Mukhtar was fighting behind the lines of the Italians and that a surrender by him would not constitute the victory, as which the Italian propaganda was celebrating his supposed submission.

Meanwhile, the ambitious and unscrupulous Graziani was rushing his forces through the Fezzan and towards the south-western corner and border of Libya, unable to encircle and annihilate the tribes of the Saif an-Nasir, the bulk of which safely crossed into French controlled Tunisia near Tart(?) while smaller armed detachements had outflanked the Italians and made their way to the north again. Graziani's entire campaign in the Fezzan was minutely described and analysed in a lengthy report of more than 30 pages by Freiherr von Richthofen[37], who was probably the military attache at the German Embassy in Rome. As von Richthofen remarked, the camapaign

had shown features of mounting brutality, as one evacuated oasis after another was occupied When operating south of Murzuk Italian pilots had indiscriminately gunned and bombed tents and nomads, wherever they were spotted. Thus deprived of a major slaughter, it was as a fuming fascist, that Graziani took on his new job in the Cyrenaika, the brunt of which Umar al-Mukhtar and his men had to bear.

The records in the German archive as well as the German press do not tell much about what had induced Umar al-Mukhtar to make contact with Badoglio and what had led him to resume fighting shortly after Many of the newspaper reports on the fighting until his capture in autumn 1931 adhered to the Italian propaganda line that Umar al-Mukhtar had committed treason The lengthy report by von Richthofen, however, provides a clue that Umar Al-Mukhtar put conditions, which amounted to the maintenance of full sovereignty rather than to unconditional surrender. According to the report, Umar al-Mukhtar had refused to meet Badoglio and negotiate with him in Italian held Banghazi nor near the town They pretended that only outside Italian controlled territory was it possible for them to honour Badoglio with their customary equestrian feats and cavalcades. Was Umar al-Mukhtar expressing pride of a freedom loving man or was he forestalling the fate, that had befallen Sayid Muhammad Er-Riba not long ago or was there a plot to pay this back on Badoglio? In the absence of evidence, there was wide scope for speculation among German reporters Von Richtofen's report implies that the meeting took place and he uses the colonial phraseology of the time that the entire Cyrenaika was now pacified and safely in Italian hands[38]. At the end of the report, however, he takes up the topic again by saying, that the Italians had let themselves to be deceived and that for unknown reasons the population had delayed the delivery of their weapons. He infers, that in view of the deployement of the bulk of the Italian army in the distant Fezzan, Umar al-Mukhtar had suddenly given up his passive resistance to exploit the opportunity. Due to the lack of troops the Italian airforce was now assigned the task of strafing the Jabal al-Akhdar Von Richthofen records the fact, and speculates, that the discovery of a leader of the Saif an-Nasir among the casualties of a group of armed men, that had been heading towards theCyrenaika but been intercepted, might have had something to do with the change of Umar al-Mukhtar's tactics. This account, too, leaves many questions open. Further research is needed to clear

such questions[37] the reader at that time was left with guesses, but he surely must have come to the conclusion, that whatever the exact course of events may have been, it would not contradict the best evidence against the Italian version of unconditional surrender and treason: Umar al-Mukhtar's life and heroship itself

By May 1930 von Richthofen reported to Berlin that after the occupation of the Fezzan and following upon the appointment of Graziani as governor of the Cyrenaika, the defeat of Umar al-Mukhtar would be a matter of a few weeks or months only. A year later, a report from the Embassy in Rome underlined that the Italians had not succeeded yet in the subjection of the Cyrenaika, because the fighting in the Jabal Al-Akhdar could not be stopped. Furthermore, the military positions along the 29. latitude had proved unable to cut off communications between the Jabal al-Akhdar and the Kufra Oases. The report goes on to describe the measures which Graziani was adopting: the deportation of the mass of the population into concentration camps; the prohibition of the Sanusiya and their zawiyas as well as the expropriation of their property[40]; the erection of wirefences along the boundary with Egypt: the massive employment of the airforce and the strict orders to the pilots to machine-gun and bomb man and animal when discovered during their daily reconnaissance flights over the Jabal al-Akhdar[41]. As the report ends up, these measures so far had failed to break the resistance of the population; smaller Italian patrols or wrecked pilots always ran danger of being attacked and slain, as often happened. By mid-December 1930, an armed group from Kufra had succeeded to penetrate the Italian lines and reach the coast, where they operated for several weeks before they were pushed back into the interior, without having been completely defeated.

While this guerilla war continued, much to the dismay of Italian propaganda, Graziani prepared for the invasion and occupation of Kufra. In the course of the year 1930 five reconnaissance expeditions had to give up[42]. Data about the best lines of approach and about the strength of the garrisons of the Sanusiya were difficult to obtain. By the end of September, however, a kind of bridgehead and advanced supply base had been formed at Bir Zeghin (Elzeghin?), which lay 200 km north of Kufra. From here, areal bombings were soon after begun; at the same time Graziani enhanced his preparations for the main attack.

The details of Graziani's logistics, which were assiduously collected and

which have filled the German Embassy reports, need not concern us here. But of interest is the general characterization of Graziani's war in the Cyrenaika; according to the reports, this war was pursued with ever mounting brutality, which continued in the treatment of the concentration camps[43] There were other reports coming in from the consulates and embassies in Cairo [44], Jerusalem[45], Baghdad[46] and Batavia in Indonesia[47], which recorded protest of local Muslim organisations against Italian brutality towards their brethren. In Baghdad, for instance, telegrams and signatures were received from the gamiyat al-hidayat al-islamiya of the Sultan Ali Mosque as well as from the ulama of Samarra However, the protests were not being taken seriously, the reports suspected them to be inspired by anti-Italian propaganda and instigations by the mandatory powers France and Britain. These powers were accused of double standards, because they had not done better in the past.

On the whole, the German newspapers showed a similar tendency of measuring Italian practice with the no less harsh French and British colonial policies[48] Yet their cynicism did not reach the heights of von Richthofen, who in his reports to the Foreign Office compared the relatively poor performance of Graziani in the Fezzan with the greater efficiency of the former German colonial war against the Hereros in South-West Africa[49] and who wondered, why the Italians did not make political use of the captured women[50] .

A strikting feature of the German press reports in this third period of the Libyan-Italian struggle was, however, the emphasis, which increasingly was laid on a law and order colonialism as a prerequisite for the full development of the fertile lands of the Cyrenaika It was nearly always implied, that the local population did not know how to make proper use of the agrarian potential below their feet. It contradicted this bias, that the reports did mention facts such as, that the tenacity of the resistance in the interior had probably also to do with the fact, that the Italians were ousting the people from their pastures and oases and even from those parts of the desert, where under harsh conditions they had managed to eke out a scanty livelyhood[51]. On the 13th of June 1930, the kolnishce Zeitung published the fantastic news, that Graziani even contemplated to deport the entire population to Italy, as it was not larger than the population of Palermo. Graziani's difficulties in coping with Umar al-Mukhtar's guerilla tactics were

extensively reported to the German reader[52], if only because they made good stuff for entertainment. Thus there was more of the lure of the desert and of the spell of the old man on the mountain[53], of the romantic aura, which the cold North has attributed to the harsh life in the sun-shine deserts. The exceptional conditions of the Jabal al-Akhdar hardly ever were explained to the German reader. Less sensational and romantic were the reports in the respectable Vossische Zeitung, which was published in Berlin. Not only was the terminology of Italian propaganda like rebellion, brigands, insurgents, pacification (but also concentration camps) carefully put into quotation marks, but there was also at least some detail and emphasis about what enabled Umar al-Mukhtar to maintain his Jihad, namely the solidarity of the population[54].

The press reports of spring 1931 unavoidably focused on the Italian conquest and occupation of Kufra[55]. It was celebrated as a masterstroke by Graziani[56]; less was said and reported about the local community, its hapless defence and its leadership. The kölnische Zeitung[59] knew to tell, that a certain Italian colonel with the name of Brezzi had not long before stayed in the oasis for 10 months as a prisoner. While there, he had noticed the erosion of the authority of the Grand Senussi Leaders, the head of whom had fled to the northern oasis of Bosku. After a happy escape, Brezzi's report had prompted Graziani to risk the conquest of Kufra. Other reports knew of fierce fighting[58] or of the consternation of the defenders about the freshness of the Italian troops. The importance of the fall of Kufra was generally seen in the cutting of the only remaining supply lines and smuggling of arms from Egypt. In unison with the reports of the Embassy in Rome it was estimated that the conquest of Kufra would soon lead to a major diplomatic conflict with both France and Britain, who still had to accomodate the new fascist drive in Italy's bid for an empire in Africa[60].

As to the repercussions, which the fall of kufra might have on Umar al-Mukhtar's Jihad in the Jabal Al-Akhdar there were traces of scepticism[61] mixed, however, with assurance, that his defeat would very soon be an established fact.

Umar al-Mukhtar's unbent zeal of fighting for the freedom, religion and sovereignty of his people and of the Dar al-Islam, his desperate and gallant acts of bravery, his skill of maintaining mobility, his tremendous capacity for enduring hardship of all kinds: all this afforded him another extension

of eight months. In his final engagement with the Italians, he nearly managed to escape the inferno of the guns and bombs of Graziani's warmachine; handicaped by the death of his horse and by his wounds he was captured. As the Vossische Zeitung reported and commented; «Thus ends romanticism in the age of technology». His last words, when he was taken to the gallows soon after, were later by the Hamburger correspondent quoted as the sura: «We came from Allah and to Allah we return»[13].

Conclusion.

This survey of the contemporary German perception of Umar al-Muktar's struggle for freedom and independence of his country and people and the Arab and Islamic World at large, is revealing in more than one way. Surely, the source material is too limited to allow a final judgement of the contemporary German perception. Also, it has to be considered,that Germany then had just gone through the stage of splendour and misery of an imperial power and it found it difficult to accomodate to the new social and political realities and conditions of its existence

Against this historical background of a Germany, that had been defeated, that had suffered the nemesis of power and that was struggling with itself in-finding a new sense of direction, the extensive and intensive attention to events in Libya may be regarded as all the more astonishing. However, this fact is more than just one more piece of ample evidence of the reflects of Umar al-Mukhtar's Jihad on the international level. It also tragically shows, that for many of the close observors and reporters fascism obviously was not the monster, that it actually was. Its neat and mechanic perfection, its cold-blooded ruthlessness and iron sense of direction and destruction found appraisal in some quarters. Thus the contemporary German perception of Umar al-Muktar's Jihad against Italian colonialism also reflects forebodings of the rise of German fascism. Nevertheless - and this should be stressed - there obviously was also a section of German society, that accorded Umar al-Mukhtar's shining personality, dedication and struggle due respect.

Finally, among the many lessons that may be taken from such a survey of press reports and official recording, an important one has in my opinion been given by the solitary voice of the Islam-Echo. When Leopoled Weiss, in March 1931, in the Neue Züri cher Zeitung reported from Mekka and reflected on Umar al-Mukhtar's forthcoming end in the Jabal al-Akhdar,

he concluded that his struggle incorporated a great idea, which cannot possibly vanish Today, there is need for a new and stronger Islam Echo, to carry that message to the West.

Footnotes:

1. cf. Ehrenzeugnis fur einen nordafri Kanischen Freiheitsfuhrer: Umar al-Mukhtar. Islam Echo, Berlin Mai 1928. W. Paschen: Das Ende Omar al-Mukhtars. Italiens Sie in der Cyrenaika. Ubersee - und Kolonialzeitung, Berlin November 1951.
2. Ibidem; also: Leopold Weib: Ein arabischer Held. Sayid Ahmad al-Senussi. Neue Zurischer Zeitung 29.3.1931.
3. S Rathjens: Die Stellung Italiens in Nordafrika. Hamburger Fremdenblatt Nr. 115. 26. April 1926.
4. s. Fn. 1.
5. E. Banse: Tripoli Italiana!, Die Erde 15.12.1912.
6. S. Fn. 3. Leopold Weiss (S. FN2) writes that Sayid Ahmad al-Sanussi was taken to Istanbul by an Austrian submarine.
7. Deutsche Bostschaft Rom 21.3.1927, AA Pol II Politik - Tripolis Bd.2, 1. Nr./1117.
8. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 22. Nov. 1920. AA Pol 11 Politik- Tripolis Bd. 2, 1. Nr. 9404 D/B.
9. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 5.5.1921, AA Pol II Politik - Triplois Bd. 2, Nr. 1/3175.
10. cf. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 6.1.1923, Politik - Tripolis Bd. 2, Nr. I/38. AA Pol II.
11. This theme is the subject of a voluminous work by Klaus Hildebrand: Vom Reich zum Welterich. Hitler, NSDAP und koloniale Frage 1919-1945. München 1969.
12. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 8.10.1921, Politik - Tripolis Bd. 2 Nr. 1/6729, AA Pol II.
13. Deutsche Gesandtschaft Kairo, 26.12.1912, AA Pol II Politik-Tripolis Nr. 684.
14. E.E. Evans-Pritchard: The Sanusi of Cyrenaica, Oxford 1949, 1963.
15. Weser-Zeitung (Bremen) Nr. 309, 4.5.1922.
16. Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, Berlin 10.11.1922.
17. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 6.1.1923, AA Pol II Politik - Tripolis Bd. 2, Nr. 1 38.
18. Ibidem.
19. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 12.3.1923, AA, Pol II Politik- Tripolis Bd. 2, Nr. 1/1474.
20. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 5.5.1924; 12.5.1924; 15.5.1924. AA Pol II Politik - Tripolis Nr. 1 /2327, 2522.
21. S. report dated 15.5.1924 u. 19.1.1928.
22. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 8.11.1928. AA Pol II Politik - Tripolis Nr. 1/4690.
23. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 21.7.1928. AA Pol II Politik - Tripolis Bd.2, Nr. 1/2296 II.
24. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 19.5.1927, AA Pol II Politik - Tripolis Bd. 2, Nr. 1/2061.
25. Hamburger Fremdenblatt Nr. 115, 26.4.1926.
26. Hamburger Echo, 13.4.1926.

27. Splendour and misery of the dictatorship must be borne by Italy alone.
28. Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, Berlin 6.8.1927. (Nr. 361).
29. kölnische Zeitung, 31.5.1931. bei dem Eroberer Libyens.
30. Islam Echo Berlin 5.10. 1927.
31. S. Appendix A.
32. Islam-Echo Berlin Nr. 6, 5.3.1928, S. Appendix A.
33. s. Appendix A.
34. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 15.5.1929, AA Pol II Politik - Tripolis, Nr. I/1834.
35. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 7.6.1929. Nr. I/2078.
36. Nr. I/2338.
37. Deutsche Botschaft Rom, 22.3.1959, Nr. I/628, 32, p.
38. Ibidem P. 15.
39. S. However E.E. Pritchard, op. cit., p. 182ff.
40. The Frankfurter Nachrichten, on 11.6.1930, spread the news that the property was being used for building mosques for other than sanusiya muslim communities.
41. Deutsche Botscheft Rom, 2.2.1951, Nr. I/194, P.3.
42. S. Fn. 29.
43. S. Fn. 41. report P.7.
44. References in the other reports.
45. German General Consulate Jerusalem, 23.4.1931, Nr. 26/31 AA Pol II Politik - Tripolis. Most probably the problem of the Cyrenaica was dealt with by the islamic conference, which the mufti of Jerusalem had organized in the spring of that year.
46. Deutsches konsulat Bagdad, 4.5. 1931, Nr. 306 AA Politik - Tripolis.
47. Deutsches Generalkonsulat für Niederländisch-Indien, Batavia-Centrum, 7.8.1931, Nr. 834/31 AA Pol II Politik - Tripolis.
48. cf. Kolnische Zeitung Nr. 702 Die Cyrenaika ohne Schleier (1930). s. also: Neue Zurischer Zeitung Nr. 1473, 30.7.1929 Die Entwaffnung Libyens.
49. S. Fn. 37, report p.16.
50. Ibidem P.30.
51. Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung Nr. 249, Berlin 1.6.1929.
52. kölnische Zeitung 13.6.1930.
55. Kölnische Zeitung Nr. 702, 24.12.1930. Die Cyrenaika ohne Schleier.
54. Vossische Zeitung, Berlin 29.7.1931. s. Appendix A.; Nr. 299, 16.12.30.
56. S. Fn. 29.
57. Ibidem
58. Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung Nr. 50 Berlin 30.1.1931. Neues Afrikanisches Problem.
59. s. Fn. 29.
60. S. The Times, London 16.9.1931.
61. Vossiche Zeitung, Berlin 26.1.1931. Die Cyrenaika befriedet (this time without quotation marks).
63. Hamburgischer Correspondent, Nr. 303. fine Wiste erwacht, 1.6.1932.